1400 I STREET EXTENSION

by

HELEN F. KING, October 15, 1989

with

Another Perspective by Prue King Draper

Helen: We purchased our chicken ranch from Mrs. Annie Middleton in July 1946. "WE" were T. (Ted) T. King, wife Helen, children Prudence, Stanton, Mary Nell and Tom. Ted's aging father, J. Stanton King II, was with us, too. In fact, it was the need to care for him in his declining years that motivated us most of all to become "independent."

We soon learned that "The Chicken Business" was not as lucrative as we had been led to believe. We had to learn to save in every way possible. Early on, we learned that chickens get sick. And then they don't eat, and then they don't lay eggs, or worse, sicken and die.

Learning that The Chicken Pharmacy, a lucrative business in Petaluma then, had vaccines for Newcastle Disease, and Coccidiosis, Ted decided that we must vaccinate all the pullets before they reached egg-laying age. And we would do this deed ourselves, to save money. Dr. Davis of The Pharmacy assured Ted we could do it, and even gave him one demonstration.

Ted was a great organizer. Vaccination was planned for a Saturday — naturally, since the four children would be

home then to help. Their recollections of this regularly recurring chore vary so wildly that I shall not try to put them into this narrative.

We began to buy unsexed, day-old chicks. Saved money that way. When the chicks reached an age where cockerels could be identified, we spent a Saturday separating them — the cockerels going into finishing batteries in the barn, the pullets into a small chicken house nearby. Here they lived for three more weeks, eating, drinking, resting and growing. Then it was time for vaccination!

Every family member had a "chore." Since their memories do not at all agree with mine, I can only tell you that it took us ALL to do this, and I recall the following procedure.

Ted used a "catching panel," a six-foot high, wire contraption, that folded into three sections, wired together. Inside the pullet house, Ted and I shooed the pullets into this moveable cage, Ted went in with them and quickly closed the last panel. I, too, was inside the panel — with two bottles of vaccine on a shelf before me. In one was a short brush, with bristles, short and sharp as wires. In the other, a sturdy wooden handle from which protruded two stiff, very sharp wires.

As Ted grabbed a pullet by her legs, he upended her, exposing her "vent." The pullet begins frantically wriggling and loud squawking but with deft strokes learned

only after a few tries, I made three passes with the vaccine bearing brush inside the vent, pressing hard enough to bring blood. The struggling pullet generally retaliated with a wild squirt of defecation! Quickly, Ted grabbed a wing, and presented the web to me. With the two sharp needles, I punctured this web with the other vaccine. Another squawk as Ted pushed the vaccinated bird into the "catching box," a wooden crate with moveable slat opening in the top. When this box held 40 pullets, Ted called a recess so he and Stanton could load it on the wheelbarrow for taking to the big laying house. Now we could take time for a cup of coffee, a cigarette, a trip to the bathroom. Yes, we always had milk and cookies for the poor, "overworked" children!

Then back to our chores — we had to get 300 pullets into the laying houses, so must finish this dirty demanding job — in time to gather the noon eggs, have lunch, a short rest, gather the evening eggs, clean and pack them before supper time.

Many unpleasant things connected with life at King's X Ranch have been erased from my memory, thank goodness! But not vaccination. However, our treatment worked — our pullets did NOT develop the dread diseases, but lived long, happy lives and graciously laid many eggs for us.

* * *

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

by

PRUE KING DRAPER, 1988
(Daughter of Helen F. King)

Life on our chicken ranch was a miserable experience for me. I was the oldest of four children, a teenager and had enjoyed life in San Francisco and Marin County during my father's Navy years. Ranch life in Petaluma was a far cry from that!

I was expected to collect and clean eggs every afternoon after school, help herd baby chicks under the brooder in the evening, and toss young hens up on the roost after dark, to keep them from smothering themselves in heaps in the corners. After full dark, we took our dogs and made rat raids on all the chicken houses, bashing with clubs the rats the dogs didn't catch.

Also, by the time we got into the chicken business, it was becoming very hard for family operations to survive. We ate a LOT of cull hens and cracked eggs.

Weekends were usually devoted to herding and culling or vaccinating chickens. There was very little time for extracurricular activities after school — or extra money to finance luxuries.

Hard work and heavy lifting took their toll on my parents, and they had a number of health problems as a result. For me, the happiest day of my life came when the doctor diagnosed my respiratory problems as an allergy to

feathers!

I think the chicken ranch life made me and my sister and brothers stronger and more cohesive than we might have been otherwise, but in every other way it was a period of my life about which I have very few rosy memories.

* * *

NOTES FROM

THOMAS F. KING

The War (World War II) brought us west; my father was a Naval Reserve officer serving in the Pacific. They came from Atlanta, Georgia via San Diego and Sausalito. My parents decided to settle in California where they could get a country place, in order, as I understand it, to make my father's father, then in his declining years, comfortable; he was from the "hollers" of Eastern Tennessee.

My parents owned the ranch (1400 I Street extension), with the bank, from 1946, until my mother sold it (in the late 80's). They bought it from Mrs. Annie Middleton, widow of Captain Middleton, whose death (over a chess board at a downtown chess club) caused her to sell. The Captain's ghost haunted the place for years, and may still.

There were about six acres, but only four were on the flat and suitable for chickens. We had three long houses, a pullet house and a brooder house, together with a small cage operation.

My chores varied through time, but included carrying feed to the houses; gathering eggs; feeding and watering cockerels; helping with vaccinations; plucking feathers from butchered chickens; hauling dead chickens from the houses to the cans out front where they were picked up by the tallow works truck; trapping varmints; occasionally scraping roosts (I wasn't really strong enough for this until about the time the business folded); care of various kinds of non-chicken animals (we kept a cow, often had calves, a few sheep, sometimes a goat, sometimes a pig, ducks, sometimes geese, sometimes rabbits).

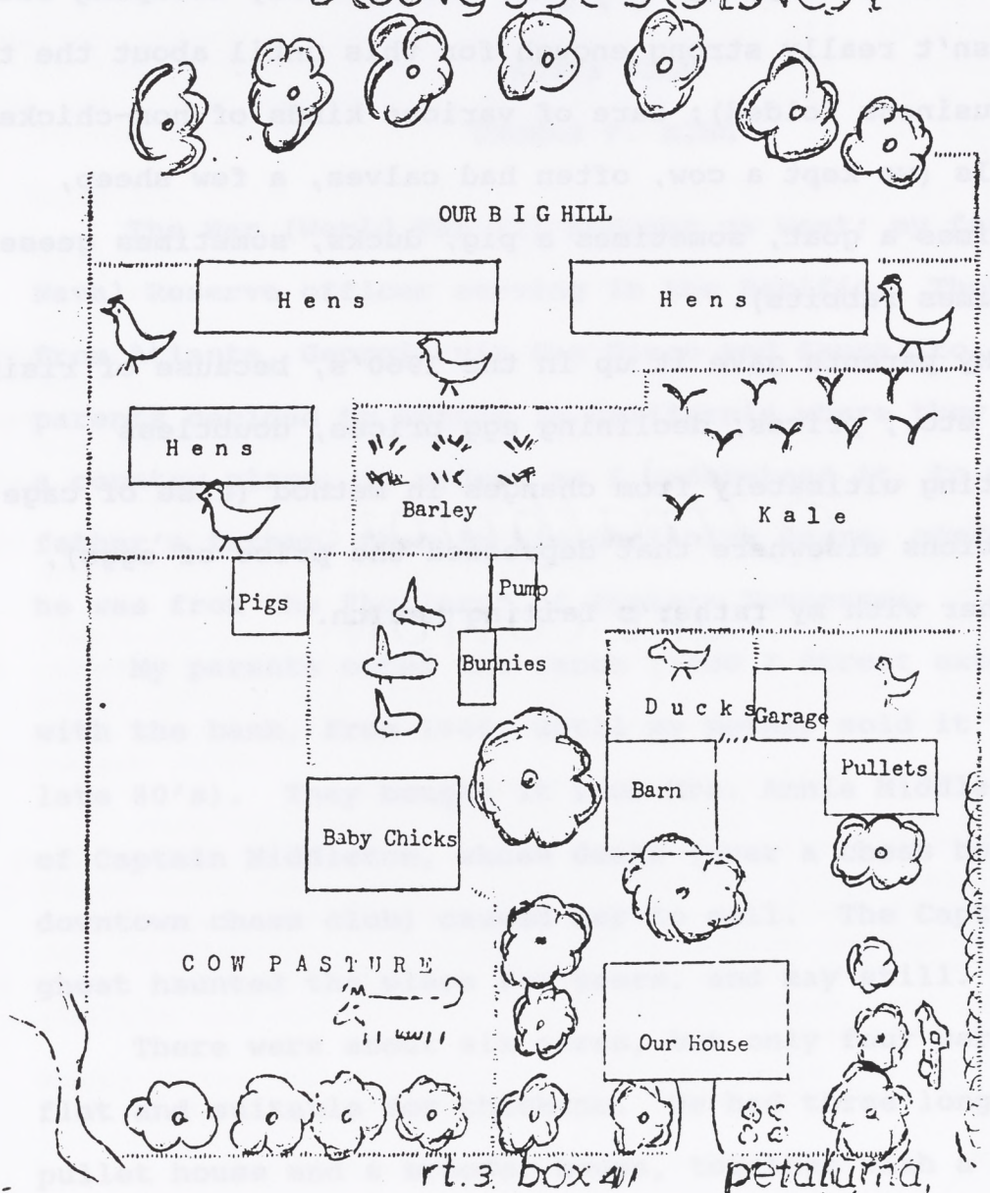
My parents gave it up in the 1960's, because of rising feed, etc., prices; declining egg prices, doubtless resulting ultimately from changes in method (rise of cage operations elsewhere that depressed the price of eggs), together with my father's failing health.

King Ranch
Ted and Helen F. King I St. Extension

KINGS' "X" RANCH
1400 "I" St. Ext.
Petaluma, Calif.

December 1946

MERRY CHRISTMAS
from
KING'S X RANCH



rt. 3. box 41 petaluma, calif.

Mary Nell

Helen

Ted

Barbara

274

Sunday - Oct. 15 1989

Dear Maxine —

Sorry this has taken me so long — hope it can still be a part of your "Chicken House Project".

Sincerely

Helen F. King

1400 I St Ext

762-8597

Obituaries

Helen F. King

Helen Fulling King, a retired teacher and chicken rancher who loved to share her music with others, died Sunday at a Petaluma hospital after a short illness and complications following a stroke. She was 89.

A native of Boonville, Ind., she was educated at Indiana University, where she was a member of the Delta Gamma Sorority, as well as the University of Tulsa and San Francisco State College.

She and her husband, Ted King, moved to Petaluma in 1946. They operated a chicken ranch on the I Street extension for a number of years.

Mrs. King, who had operated a nursery school in Atlanta, helped develop the adult education program of the Petaluma Parent Nursery School and was its director for many years. She later taught at McDowell Elementary School.

She loved to play the piano and could play by ear anything her audience could hum. She shared her talent with family and friends. For years she was pianist for the Petaluma Music Makers, who entertained and led sing-alongs for clubs and convalescent hospitals throughout Sonoma County.

She organized musical programs at Valley Orchards retirement center in Petaluma, where she had lived the past seven years, and was an enthusiastic participant in its activities.

She also enjoyed bridge, chess, gardening and handcrafts. She was a member of St. John's Episcopal Church, Daughters of the America Revolution, California Retired Teachers Association, the Petaluma chapter of the American Association of University Women, Petaluma Historical Museum, Friends of the Library and Olompali People.

Survivors include her children, Prudence Draper of Cotati, Mary Nell McCann of Petaluma, J. Stanton King of Atlanta and San Francisco, and Thomas King of Washington, D.C.; 14 grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; a sister, Marian Kratt of Tulsa, Okla.; and several nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her husband, Ted.

At her request, there will be no funeral. Friends are invited to a memorial service at 1 p.m. Nov. 20 at St. John's Episcopal Church, 40 Fifth St. Arrangements were handled by Parent-Sorensen Mortuary of Petaluma.

Contributions may be made in her memory to the Petaluma Valley Hospital Foundation, 400 N. McDowell Blvd., Petaluma 94954; Hospice of Petaluma, 415 A St., Petaluma 94952; the Petaluma Historical Museum, Fourth and B streets, Petaluma 94952; or a favorite charity.